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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000488

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2016  
TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: INFLUENTIAL AOUNIST MP ACKNOWLEDGES FLAWS  
IN FEBRUARY 6 COMMUNIQUE

REF: BEIRUT 00413

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) Free Patriotic Movement MP Farid El-Khazen conceded that the February 6 joint communique of Michel Aoun and Hassan Nasrallah was a flawed document with ambiguities and omissions, but should be used as a starting point to prompt a passive government into action. According to El-Khazen, it also marked the first time Hizballah's previously open-ended claims had been confined to specific and measurable objectives. Concerning the possibility that Nasrallah was playing Aoun for a fool, El-Khazen emphasized that if it turns out the Hizballah leader "was bluffing, we should tear up the communique." El-Khazen agreed that Nasrallah's sincerity with regard to the commitments made in the document should be put to the test as soon as possible. He stated the two most likely issues would be: the status of Lebanese prisoners being held in Syria, and amnesty for SLA members who fled the country following Israel's withdrawal in 2000. El-Khazen admitted the document has several faults and could have been drafted more carefully, but he reaffirmed an earlier contention made by Michel Aoun that it was better than the "evident inaction" of the Siniora government. End summary.

12. (C) MP Farid El-Khazen met with the Ambassador and poloff on February 16. El-Khazen, who is a professor and chairman of the political studies department at the American University of Beirut, is regarded as the most politically astute member of Aoun's bloc. Unlike Aoun's close advisor Gibran Bassil, who consistently demonstrates animosity toward Saad Hariri and disdain for PM Siniora, El-Khazen's analysis of the political situation is more measured and places greater value on cooperation and coordination among the pro-reform elements in Lebanon.

FLAWS IN THE DOCUMENT

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13. (C) MP El-Khazen voiced concern that the Aoun-Nasrallah joint communique was a flawed document and its roll-out had more to do with scoring political points than sound strategy. He regretted that the document failed to refer to the 1989 Ta'if Accord, which established communal balances in Lebanon, and is essentially considered an integral part of the country's constitution. He also admitted the article dealing with "consensual democracy" could be interpreted to be a one-way street, particularly when one considers the frequent unilateralism exercised by Hizballah, such as when it decides

to initiate hostilities along the Blue Line.

¶4. (C) But El-Khazen emphasized his belief that Hizballah was the product of 25 years of mistakes and miscalculations by the Lebanese government, culminating in the July 2005 decision to bring the terrorist organization into the government. He rebuffed the argument that the February 6 communique gave Hizballah political cover by postulating that last July's decision was far more egregious in that regard. As Michel Aoun had argued earlier in the week, El-Khazen insisted that the communique was a necessary first step to "fence Hizballah in" and make it commit itself to achievable benchmarks that would lead to disarmament and the elimination of Lebanon's state-within-a-state.

#### EARLY AND CONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR 1559

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¶5. (C) He argued that Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) was the earliest and most consistent Lebanese advocate of the disarmament provisions of UNSCR 1559 -- and continues to be a firm supporter of that fundamental document. The MP from Jbeil asked that the international community continue its pressure for comprehensive 1559 implementation, because that would help maintain momentum for the national dialogue the Aounists were proposing. It would help propel the process to move from the communique's "blueprint" to a comprehensive resolution acceptable to all Lebanon's communities.

¶6. (C) "This paper is costing us," he insisted, referring to the widely acknowledged loss of support for Michel Aoun among the Christian community since the release of the communique. Like his FPM colleagues, he criticized the lack of progress by Siniora's government to address the numerous

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issues involved in transitioning the country into a stable democracy. "Perhaps this is a flawed document, perhaps Nasrallah is not sincere, but at least its a serious attempt," he commented.

¶7. (C) El-Khazen, who has represented the FPM across Lebanon's sectarian divides, was clear that the communique should have a deadline. He said that Hizballah's commitments in the document should be put to the test. He agreed with the idea that the articles dealing with the hundreds of Lebanese prisoners still held in Syrian jails, and the fate of the SLA fighters who fled Lebanon in 2000 following the Israeli withdrawal, would be good starting points. The influential MP said that if Nasrallah was not willing to abide by his commitments, "...we should tear up the communique."

#### UPCOMING ELECTION IN BAABDA-ALEY

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¶8. (C) Concerning the contentious by-election in Baabda-Aley scheduled for mid-March, the moderate El-Khazen insisted the selection of a "consensus candidate" that could unify Aoun's forces with the March 14 coalition was still possible, but the Hariri-led majority was not cooperating. El-Khazen said that he, along with four other Aounist MPs, would be meeting with Saad Hariri tomorrow for a condolence call, but he did not believe the by-election would be discussed, even though the deadline for filing a candidacy was only days away.

¶9. (C) In a new development concerning the by-election, Aounist MP Ibrahim Kanaan told poloff on February 17 that he had been representing Michel Aoun in negotiations with Lebanese Forces MP George Adwan to determine if a "consensus candidate" was possible. Kanaan indicated that on Sunday, February 19, the two political parties would make a joint statement agreeing on such a candidate. Although the deal was "90 percent" assured and he expected it to go through, he also expressed anxiety that when dealing with Michel Aoun and

Samir Ja'ja' on any issue, one could never be certain of the final outcome.

COMMENT

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¶10. (C) The reasoning used by El-Khazen was similar to the arguments put forth by Michel Aoun (reftel), but the El-Khazen was much more willing to put Hizballah to the test, while Aoun appears more ready to trust his new political ally. With the growing realization in the Aoun camp that the communique may not have been the political coup they celebrated on February 6, the more analytical position of El-Khazen may prevail, resulting in calls for Hizballah to deliver on the commitments it has made.

¶11. (C) Concerning Baabda-Aley, if Ibrahim Kanaan's and George Adwan's efforts actually come to fruition, the agreement on a mutually-acceptable candidate may prove to be an opening that could lead to greater cooperation and coordination between Michel Aoun and the members of the March 14 Coalition -- which in turn could produce increased pressure on Hizballah. In an atmosphere of rapidly escalating tensions that some are starting to fear will inevitably lead to civil clashes (if not war), we would welcome a decision on a "consensus candidate," even if that is not the most democratic solution. End comment.

FELTMAN